

Members may contact the Foreign Affairs Committee to join this important anti-traffic initiative. I encourage you all to sign on to my legislation.

As people of goodwill around the world observe Human Trafficking Awareness Day this weekend, let us move beyond mere awareness, let us abolish this injustice, and protect and restore the dignity of those who have survived such exploitation.

INTERIM AGREEMENT WITH IRAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, our interim agreement with Iran gives us an opportunity to unwind seemingly intractable, interrelated conflicts throughout the Middle East.

There is no reason for Congress to complicate by further enhancing sanctions now that are already working. We have this 6 months to a year window to fashion a longer-term agreement. The fact that we are even talking with Iran is the most encouraging signal that we have seen in 34 years. Let's use this diplomatic window. There are hard-liners in both countries, highly suspicious, very negative, who would like to blow this agreement up.

Unless we are willing to invade and occupy Iran, even repeated bombing will delay the Iranian nuclear effort by, at best, 4 or 5 years, maybe less.

Americans have spent a trillion dollars, lost 4,000 American lives, with tens of thousands of wounded, in more than a decade in Iraq, and the country is still falling apart. Iran is bigger, stronger, and more sophisticated. I don't think you can sell that war to the American people.

Congress should calm down and give diplomacy a chance. Let's learn about this important country, its 4,000-year history, and our past mistakes with Iran, and most important, our common interest.

The Middle East has long been a simmering cauldron, with a conflict suppressed by a lid of repression held down by empire and colonial powers. That started to change a century ago with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and colonial powers trying from afar to influence human behavior by drawing lines on maps from European capitals, irrespective of religious, tribal, or ethnic realities. It set in motion a series of forces that are playing out today with tragic consequences.

Iran as the dominant Shi'a force in the region could play a huge role where we share common interest, in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan for instance.

The current situation is a result of partnerships between Congress and the Obama administration that got us to this point where Iran is willing to negotiate. Strong, effective sanctions would never have worked without careful, artful diplomacy that involved other countries like India to help us

squeeze Iran. It has worked. Let's claim credit and move on to the next steps.

We could start by trying to learn about each other. Let's promote an exchange between Iran and the United States with students, religious leaders, maybe even parliamentary members and Members of Congress. Let's focus on our shared interest, like Afghanistan, where we had earlier cooperation with Iran to help overthrow the Taliban. Let's work to make progress with the agreement and beyond.

The Congress can do this most importantly by leaving it alone. Congress shouldn't meddle, Congress shouldn't muddle, Congress shouldn't give the Iranian hard-liners who don't want any agreement at all an excuse to scuttle it.

We have an opportunity to improve the most volatile region in the world and Congress shouldn't blow that opportunity.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, 48 hours, a million-plus Americans received letters in their mailboxes. They weren't overdue tax letters. They were not letters suggesting that you are at fault. It was not a notice to say that you are no longer an American citizen. It was not a letter to say you are now relieved of any responsibility to pay any bills or to provide for your family.

It was a letter denying, or extinguishing, taking away the unemployment insurance that most Americans have come to understand that, as working Americans, having worked in their life, that they would be the recipient of these benefits during a brief lapse or an extended lapse of not being able to find work. The chronically unemployed percentage is the highest that it has been in decades, and therefore, this is not the time to delay.

I hold in my hand as well a resume of a competent worker, a college graduate who has the responsibility to support his family and who has been looking for work for 2 years, earnestly, energetically, and intensely, and cannot find work.

The clock is ticking on the 30 hours in the United States Senate, but the real concern is my friends in this body. Recognizing that these letters deal with people's lives, and to make a representation that all is well, unemployment generally is 7 percent. However, it was lower than that when President Bush signed the unemployment insurance benefits in 2008. These guys, these distinguished Americans, misfits, why can't they find work? Twenty thousand-plus are veterans looking for work, men and women who served in the United States military, or, as we met in the White House on Tuesday, a mother of two distinguished men who are serving in Afghanistan.

So the 1.3 million languish while we are trying to make a determination that may not be able to be made. Frankly, I would ask that we all be reasonable. I would simply make the point that it is an emergency.

I want to pause for a moment and thank the Houston Apartment Association that has worked with me and has sent a letter to all of their members asking for those 12,000, some of whom are residents of apartments in Harris County, to be sensitive and tolerant of those individuals who can document that they were the beneficiaries or the recipients of unemployment insurance that was cut off on December 28. I want to applaud them for their sensitivity in dealing with those particular individuals. I ask mortgage companies and utility companies and city water bill companies to be tolerant as well, to be working with families who are basically without a lifeline.

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But the issue before us is the fact that these letters have gone to people such as this woman, who has looked for work every day. She liked her job and was laid off for no fault of her own.

Right now, we have the opportunity to pass a 3-month emergency relief—some of us have introduced bills for 1 year—and then contemplate, discuss, and work with what might be the appropriate way of funding the continuation.

No person unemployed, chronically or not, is happy with an unemployment benefit check. What they are happy with, Mr. Speaker, is the ability to work and to provide for their family.

So I would make the argument that as we discuss privacy issues on the Affordable Care Act, which are already taken care of by CMS, today and tomorrow on the floor we should be passing unemployment insurance. I ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me, recognizing that Americans want to work. Let's help them transition with a bridge of unemployment insurance.

OPPOSITION TO UNESCO FUNDING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, last November, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, came to meet with my colleagues and me who serve on the Foreign Affairs Committee. In that meeting, Ambassador Power told us that despite U.S. law that prohibits any funding to UNESCO because of its decision to admit a nonexistent state of Palestine to its membership, the administration was going to make it a priority to seek waiver authority to continue U.S. taxpayer funding to UNESCO.

Indeed, this is coming to fruition. There is a congressional push by some to grant the administration this waiver